

THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE SUPREME COURT



John T. Broderick, Jr.
Chief Justice

N.H. Supreme Court
Concord, NH 03301
Tel: 603-271-3751
Fax: 603-513-5475

July 25, 2007

To the members of the New Hampshire Citizens Commission on the State Courts:

On behalf of the entire Supreme Court, I am pleased to report that since I last wrote to you in December, the Judicial Branch has further improved and enhanced the services available to citizens who use our courts. Summaries of this ongoing progress in our operations are available for review on the Judicial Branch website at www.courts.state.nh.us. I hope you will agree that these reports demonstrate that we value your work, we are acting upon your recommendations and we intend to continue to do so going forward.

I believe that the most significant impact of your effort is reflected in the FY 2008-09 Judicial Branch budget, which went into effect on July 1. As you know, the Citizens Commission report was the foundation for the new "Judicial Branch Strategic Plan," which became the framework for our budget request to the legislature. Your work—which so clearly reflected the needs and concerns of citizens who use the courts—strengthened our effort and helped us provide very valuable input to lawmakers. We are grateful for the support of the legislature, whose members recognized the need, in tight economic times, to improve court services for our citizens. We thank the Citizens Commission for adding an influential new voice to the Judicial Branch budget process.

I am pleased to report the following initiatives received funding for the next biennium:

- Ten case managers in the trial courts (four in Superior Court; four in the Family Division and two in the Probate Court). These new positions will provide direct support to citizens who use the courts, especially the large number of pro se litigants who come to court without a lawyer.
- Ten new Family Division clerical employees. A workload assessment study conducted by the National Center for State Courts provided an objective measure of the need for non-judicial support staff in the

trial courts. New employees will help address the backlog in the Family Division.

- Additional training for judges and staff. The Citizens Commission stressed the need to enhance our “customer service” and to remake New Hampshire courts into a more performance-driven institution.
- Establishment of an Office of Mediation and Arbitration, effective July 1, 2007.
- Conversion of four part-time judges to full-time status during the biennium.
- Use of retired, full-time judges as needed in Superior Court.
- A part-time Website coordinator in the Judicial Branch Communications Office to enhance public education and outreach through the Internet.

As you will see in the website summaries, several other important steps have been taken with no additional expenditures by the court system: expanded use of “CourtCall,” an audio conferencing system which saves time and costs; information desks at the probate courts to assist court users; new court rules that allow lawyers to provide limited legal services at lower costs; hand cards and posters funded by the N.H. Bar to inform the public about the availability of low cost legal services; and establishment of the Supreme Court Access to Justice Commission which will develop and implement initiatives to increase access to civil legal services.

While this letter and summaries may be formally considered our “final report” to the Citizens Commission, my hope is that we will have ongoing communication about ways to improve the administration of justice. I have asked Will Abbott and Kathy Eneguess to form a small working group of commission members who would remain in contact with the court system. If you are interested in participating, please let them know. Our work has benefited enormously from citizen involvement and I believe it will lead to more progress and change for years to come.

My best wishes to you and to your families during the summer season. Thank you for all you have done for the court and for your fellow citizens.

Sincerely,

John T. Broderick, Jr.
Chief Justice

JTB/pah